

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05
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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4207
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, IS
SUBJECT: CABINET CRISIS

REF: TEL AVIV 8588

SUMMARY: THE KNESSET WILL NEXT WEEK DEBATE THE DATE
OF THE UPCOMING ELECTION. ATTENTION IN POLITICAL CIRCLES
IS BEING DEVOTED TO THE POWERS AND FUNCTIONS OF THE
CARETAKER GOVERNMENT - REFLECTING, AMONG OTHER THINGS,
DIFFERING VIEWS REGARDING A POSSIBLE TRIP BY RABIN TO
WASHINGTON. EBAN THROWS HIS HAT IN THE RING. HERZOG
REPORTEDLY CONSIDERING PARTICIPATION IN THE CAMPAIGN.
END SUMMARY.

1. THE CABINET CRISIS HAS MOVED TO A STAGE OF
CONSULTATIONS AND NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN VARIOUS POLITICAL
GROUPINGS. IT NOW APPEARS LIKELY THAT TWO BILLS WILL
BE DISCUSSED IN THE KNESSET NEXT WEEK REGARDING THE
DATE FOR THE NEXT ELECTION - ONE BILL SUBMITTED
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PREVIOUSLY BY OPPOSITION LEADER BEGIN PROPOSED
MAY 3 AND THE OTHER BILL TO BE SUBMITTED
BY THE ALIGNMENT SUGGESTS MAY 31. (ISRAELI
ELECTIONS ARE HELD ON TUESDAYS).

2. MEANWHILE A DEBATE HAS EMERGED REGARDING THE

POWERS AND FUNCTIONS OF THE CARETAKER GOVERNMENT.
IN HIS STATEMENT TO THE KNESSET DECEMBER 21 RABIN
EMPHASIZED HIS INTENTION TO CARRY OUT FULLY THE
RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE GOVERNMENT: "FROM THE
TIME OF
SUBMISSION OF THE LETTER OF RESIGNATION TO THE PRESIDENT,
THIS GOVERNMENT IS IN OFFICE AS A TRANSITION GOVERNMENT.
THE GOVERNMENT IS FUNCTIONING AND SHALL FUNCTION IN
ACCORDANCE WITH THE POLICY AND THE RESOLUTIONS OF THE GOVERNMENT
THAT WAS ESTABLISHED UNDER MYSELF ON 3 JUNE 1974
AND IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE BASIC PRINCIPLES APPROVED BY THE
KNESSET ON 3 JUNE 1974. THE REPORTS AND COMMENTARIES THAT
HAVE BEEN PUBLISHED ON SUPPOSED CHANGES IN THE POLICY
OF THIS GOVERNMENT, ARE UTTERLY GROUNDLESS."

3. THE PRIME MINISTER'S OPINION ABOUT THE POWER OF THE
TRANSITION GOVERNMENT IS SHARED BY THE JERUSALEM POST WHICH
WROTE DECEMBER 23 THAT: "IT SHOULD BE EMPHASIZED THAT A CABINET
THAT HAS RESIGNED--BUT IS CONTINUING IN OFFICE AS A SO-
CALLED 'CARETAKER'--IS NOT ONLY ENTITLED BUT IS DUTY-BOUND
TO EXERCISE ALL THE FUNCTIONS OF GOVERNMENT, UNTIL A REPLACEMENT
HAS BEEN FORMED. THE ONLY PRACTICAL LIMITATIONS ON ITS
FREEDOM OF ACTION WILL BE THOSE WHICH DERIVE FROM THE POWERS
POSSESSED BY THE KNESSET." THIS OPINION WAS SHARED BY BEN-
PORAT WHO WROTE IN YEDIOT AHRONOT DECEMBER 22 THAT: "THE
RESIGNING GOVERNMENT, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE THREE NRP
MINISTERS OUSTED AT THE DEMAND OF THE PRIME MINISTER ON
GROUNDS OF COALITION DISCIPLINE, WILL CONTINUE TO SERVE AS A
CARETAKER GOVERNMENT, POSSESSING FULL POWERS IN ALL SPHERES,
HEADED BY OUTGOING PRIME MINISTER YITZHAK RABIN UNTIL SUCH
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TIME AS ANOTHER GOVERNMENT IS ESTABLISHED WHICH WILL HAVE THE
CONFIDENCE OF THE KNESSET."

4. A DIFFERING OPINION WAS EXPRESSED IN THE SAME PAPER IN
AN EDITORIAL ON DECEMBER 22 WHICH SAID: "IF THE GOVERNMENT,
FOR CONSTITUTIONAL REASONS, REMAINS IN POWER AS A TRANSITION
GOVERNMENT UNTIL THE FORTHCOMING ELECTIONS, ITS FUNCTION
MUST BE TECHNICAL AND TECHNICAL ONLY." SUCH A GOVERNMENT,
THE PAPER ASSERTS, "MUST NOT TAKE NEW INITIATIVES OR MAKE
NEW PLANS OR UNDERTAKE NEW COMMITMENTS, BUT MUST LIMIT ITSELF
TO SEEING TO THE DAILY ADMINISTRATIVE FUNCTIONS ONLY." THE
PAPER GOES ON TO STRESS THAT THIS QUESTION OF THE POWERS OF
THE TRANSITION GOVERNMENT HAS IMPLICATIONS FOR WASHINGTON:
"FOR IF THE AMERICANS HOPE TO HAVE DECISIONS APPROVED THROUGH
RABIN'S TRANSITION GOVERNMENT AND BEHIND THE BACK OF THE
KNESSET--NAMELY, BY FRAUD--THEY WILL BE DISAPPOINTED...FOR WE
ARE A SOVEREIGN PEOPLE, AND WASHINGTON MUST REALIST THIS..."
5. THIS QUESTION OF THE POWERS OF THE INTERIM GOVERNMENT

HAS PARTICULAR APPLICABILITY REGARDING A POSSIBLE TRIP TO WASHINGTON BY RABIN. OPPOSITION LEADER BEGIN, IN HIS STATEMENT TO THE KNESSET DECEMBER 21, WHEN THE PRIME MINISTER ANNOUNCED THE CABINET'S RESIGNATION, CALLED ON RABIN NOT TO UNDERTAKE HIS PLANNED TRAVEL TO THE UNITED STATES. RABIN HAS NOT RESPONDED SPECIFICALLY TO THAT COMMENT BUT HAS EMPHASIZED, AS NOTED ABOVE, HIS INTENTION TO CARRY OUT FULL GOVERNMENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES. EDITORIAL OPINION AND COMMENT REGARDING SUCH A VISIT IS DIVIDED. FOR EXAMPLE, HAARETZ WASHINGTON CORRESPONDENT (MARGALIT) WROTE DECEMBER 22 THAT: "US OFFICIALS ARE MAKING NO SECRET OF THE FACT THAT A GENEVA CONFERENCE WOULD BE NO MORE THAN A CEREMONY, A KIND OF GLOBAL EFFORT TO ASSIST THE PRIME MINISTER'S ELECTION CAMPAIGN. RABIN'S WASHINGTON VISIT WOULD HAVE THE SAME PURPOSE. CARTER REALIZES THAT TWO MONTHS BEFORE THE ELECTIONS, PRACTICAL PROPOSALS CANNOT BE EXPECTED FROM A PRIME MINISTER WHO IS ALREADY A DUCK. EVEN IF RABIN COMES TO WASHINGTON AFTER HAVING BEEN CONFIRMED AS THE LABOR PARTY CANDIDATE FOR

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THE PREMIERSHIP, AMERICAN OFFICIALS WOULD REALIZE THAT HE IS SEEKING REELECTION AND NOT A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT WITH THE ARABS."

6. DAVAR'S WASHINGTON CORRESPONDENT (BARNEA) SAW NO DIFFICULTY WITH A VISIT TO WASHINGTON AND REPORTED THAT IT WAS UNDER CONSIDERATION IN THE FRAMEWORK OF INVITATIONS TO SEVERAL MIDDLE EAST LEADERS: "IN CONTACTS WITH THE ISRAEL EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON, PERSONALITIES CLOSE TO PRESIDENT-ELECT JIMMY CARTER STATED THAT THE NEW ADMINISTRATION WOULD FAVORABLY CONSIDER INVITING LEADING MIDDLE EAST FIGURES TO POLITICAL TALKS IN WASHINGTON. THE INVITATION TO PRIME MINISTER YITZHAK RABIN MIGHT ALSO COME UNDER THIS CATEGORY. SOURCES CONNECTED WITH THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION TOLD THE ISRAELIS THAT RABIN'S STATUS AS PRIME MINISTER OF A CARETAKER GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT CONSTITUTE A HINDRANCE TO HIS BEING INVITED TO WASHINGTON, IF IT IS DECIDED TO HOLD A SERIES OF HIGH-LEVEL TALKS AFTER THE NEW ADMINISTRATION TAKES OVER."

7. IN OTHER DEVELOPMENTS FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER EBAN HAS ANNOUNCED HIS AVAILABILITY FOR LEADING THE LABOR PARTY IN THE ELECTION. HE SAID ON TELEVISION DECEMBER 22 THAT: "I HAVE NOT CHANGED MY WELL KNOWN VIEWS THAT IF THE LABOR PARTY DOES NOT COME UP WITH A NEW TEAM AND A NEW HEAD OF THE TEAM, IT WILL NOT WIN THE PUBLIC'S CONFIDENCE, I SHALL ASK THESE PARTY MEMBERS WHO KNOW ME FROM OUR COMMON EFFORTS AT THE LABOR PARTY, AS WELL AS MY WORK IN THE INTERNATIONAL AND JEWISH ARENA, TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE POSSIBILITY THAT I COULD PROVIDE THE PARTY WITH A UNITING SPIRIT."

8. IN AN ARTICLE FROM WASHINGTON MARGALIT WRITES IN DECEMBER 23 HAARETZ THAT ISRAELI UN AMBASSADOR HERZOG IS RETURNING TO JERUSALEM FOR CONSULTATIONS IN ORDER TO REVIEW THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND ARAB MOVES THERE. WHILE HE IS IN ISRAEL, MARGALIT REPORTS, HERZOG WILL REVIEW HIS POSSIBLE PARTICIPATION IN THE CAMPAIGN. ACCORDING TO THIS REPORT HERZOG IS BEING UNCLASSIFIED

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CONSIDERED FOR THE POST OF MINISTER FOR INFORMATION IN THE NEXT CABINET, A CANDIDATE FOR THE MAYOR OF TEL AVIV, OR A LEADING CANDIDATE FOR THE KNESSET FROM THE LABOR PARTY. TOON

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